THE LITTLE SHEPHERD

UKRAINIAN FOLK TALE

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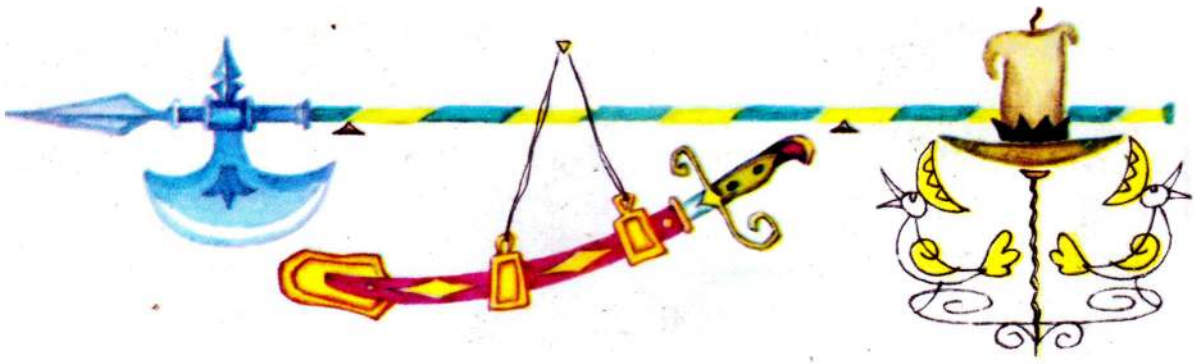
Once upon a time there was a Little Shepherd. The only thing he knew from early childhood was tending and guarding the sheep. One day a large boulder weighing some twenty stone fell out of the sky onto the pasture. To while away the time, he played with the boulder: he would tie it to the lash of his whip and toss it high in the sky, then nap away the whole day. Only when he woke up would the boulder come flying back out of the sky and land with such force that it stuck deep in the ground. Or he would throw his coat on the grass and put the boulder on top so no one could steal the coat, for three strong men or more could not have moved the boulder an inch, however hard they tried.

"Oh, stop hauling that boulder around," his mother would scold him. "Why, it could ruin your health."

But he did not care: he went on playing with it as if it were nothing at all. One day a dragon appeared in the land of the Czar, where the Little Shepherd lived. The dragon started picking up rocks that weighed about eighty stone each to build himself a palace, and demanded that the Czar give him his daughter. The Czar grew very frightened, and sent runners throughout all the land to find a knight strong enough to destroy the dragon. Well, they looked and they looked, but could not find one.

The Little Shepherd heard the news and went around boasting: "I could kill that dragon with my whip."



The people went and told the Czar about it, and he sent for the Little Shepherd. When he was brought before the Czar, and the Czar saw the Little Shepherd was hardly more than a boy, he cried in surprise: "How can you go around telling people such things! And you so little!"

"That doesn't mean a thing," said the Little Shepherd boldly.

So the Czar had to give him the two regiments of soldiers he asked for: one regiment of singers and one of musicians. The Little Shepherd had the troops line up and so commanded them you would think he had been in the army no less than twenty years. Seeing this, the Czar simply clasped his hands in amazement.

Now, some distance from the dragon's palace, the Little Shepherd ordered his regiments to stay behind.

"Keep watch here," he said. "If smoke comes out of the dragon's palace, that means I've finished him; but if there's fire, you'll know he's killed me."

He left his troops and went on alone. The dragon was such a fierce and strong monster that he never let anyone come near his palace without spitting fire and reducing him to ashes. The instant he caught sight of the Little Shepherd, he belched forth a flame, but it did no harm to the Little Shepherd whatsoever.

"Now then," asked the dragon. "What brings you here, my boy? Have you come in peace, or to fight me?"

"I come not in peace, but to fight you."

"You know," said the dragon, "you'd better go and grow up a bit, and come back in three years."

"No," said the Little Shepherd. "I'm grown up enough as it is."

"Well, well," said the dragon. "And what will you fight me with?"

"With this here whip."

And tied to the lash of his whip was the large boulder.

"All right," said the dragon. "Come and hit me."

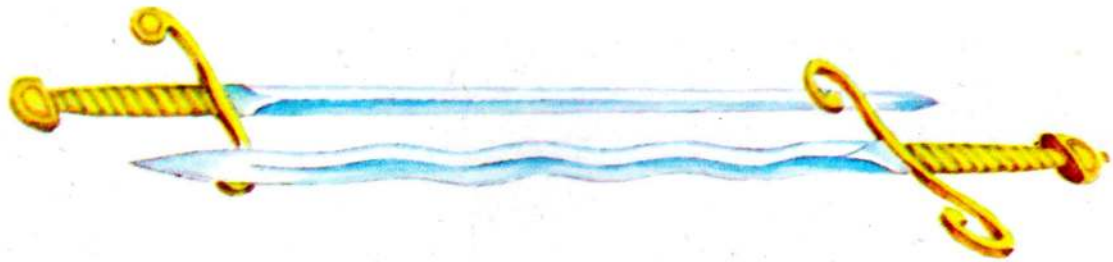
"Oh no, you hit me first."

The dragon had a large sword of steel some ten feet long. But when he hit the Little Shepherd, the sword broke to pieces.

"You stand fast," said the Little Shepherd. "It's my turn now."

And – whack! – he hit the dragon so hard the monster crumbled into dust and smoke shot up into the sky.

Oh my, were the regiments happy! The musicians struck up a merry tune, the singers joined them with a jolly song, and the Czar came out to meet the Little Shepherd. He took his arm and led him into the palace. Some years later, the Czar gave him his daughter in marriage and built a palace for the newlyweds, where they lived very happily.



But the rulers of the neighboring lands started to reproach the Czar for giving his only daughter in marriage to a bootless shepherd! The Czar himself was sorry for it, so he sent his runners throughout the land to find a strong knight who could do away with the Little Shepherd. Very soon he found two such men. After being given the arms they asked for, they went to the Little Shepherd. He was sitting at a table reading a book, when he was told the two men had come to fight him.

"What did you come for?" he asked when they entered. "Have you come in peace, or to fight me?"

"Naturally," they replied, "we've come to fight you."

Then one of them swung his sword and hit the Little Shepherd's left shoulder so hard that the weapon broke to pieces. And the other hit him across the right shoulder – but it only cut through his shirt. Then the Little Shepherd stood up, took hold of them both, and clapped them together with such force that their bones fell to the floor with a clatter. Oh my, was the Little Shepherd angry at the Czar! He went to him and told him straight without any ceremony:

"Now you'll get the same!"

The Czar was scared out of his wits, and from then on he never dreamed of laying a finger on the Little Shepherd.

ПАСТУШОК

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